

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

for the

Special Recreation Permit Application
- Commercial Paintball Operation -

(EA# OR110-02-10)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT
GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA

March 2002

Dear Reader:

We appreciate your interest in the BLM's public land management activities. We also appreciate your taking the time to review this environmental assessment (EA). If you would like to provide us with written comments regarding this project or EA, please send them to me at 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504 or email them to me at *or110mb@or.blm.gov*.

If you would like to comment but confidentiality is of concern to you, please be aware that comments, including names and addresses of respondents, will be available for public review or may be held in a file available for public inspection and review. Individual respondents may request confidentiality. If you wish to withhold your name or street address from public review or from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act, you must state this clearly at the beginning of your written comment. Such requests will be honored to the extent allowed by law. All submissions from organizations or officials of organizations or businesses will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

Abbie Jossie
Field Manager
Grants Pass Resource Area

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT

EA COVER SHEET

RESOURCE AREA: Grants Pass

FY & REPORT # EA Number OR-110-02-10

ACTION/TITLE: Special Recreation Permit Application - Commercial Paintball Operation

LOCATION: T39S, R8W, Section 3 Willamette Meridian, Josephine Co., Oregon.

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GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Special Recreation Use Permit Application
- Commercial Paintball Operation -

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Chapter 1

Purpose of and Need for Action

A. Introduction

The purpose of this environmental assessment (EA) is to assist in the decision making process by assessing the environmental and human affects resulting from implementing the proposed action and/or alternatives. This EA will also assist in determining if an environmental impact statement (EIS) needs to be prepared or if a finding of no significant impact (FONSI) is appropriate.

This EA tiers to the following documents:

- (1) the Final EIS and Record of Decision dated June 1995 for the Medford District Resource Management Plan (October 1994) (RMP);
- (2) the Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (February 1994);
- (3) the Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl and its attachment A entitled the Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl (April 13, 1994) (NFP); and
- (4) Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendments to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines (January 2001).

This EA also draws from the following documents:

- (1) Kerby Watershed Analysis, Medford District, Grants Pass Resource Area, 1995.
- (2) USFWS Biological Opinion #1-7-96-F-392

B. Purpose and Need for the Proposal

The purpose of the proposed action is to analyze potential effects of a designated commercial paintball area on BLM lands. A special recreation permit application has been submitted by a business owner for a commercial paintball operation.

C. Project Location

The proposed project's location is shown on Map 1 (Appendix A). It is located on BLM land in T39S, R8W, Section 3. This is within the Kerby fifth field watershed.

D. Issues and Concerns Relevant to the Proposal / Application

A variety of issues and concerns were identified during the initial scoping of this proposal / application. These were raised by the project planning team, the resource area's interdisciplinary (ID) team or have

been drawn from some of the documents noted above. These issues were used in the design of the proposed project and alternatives. The pertinent issues identified are:

- There is already an abundance of trash adjacent to the site. There is a concern that issuance of the permit will lead to increased trash dumping at the site.
- Potential long term environmental effects from intensive use of the site.
- The potential for the area to become an exclusive use area for paintball activities.
- Visual impact of banners, bright colored paint, opening up of understory.

E. Land Use Allocation and Objectives

The proposed area is within the matrix land allocation. The broad management objectives for this allocation is spelled out in the NFP and the Medford District RMP.

Chapter 2

Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Introduction

This chapter describes the proposed action and alternatives that are addressed and analyzed in this EA.

B. Alternative 1: No Action Alternative

In this EA the "no-action" alternative is defined as not implementing any aspect of the proposed action alternative(s) (i.e., not issuing the requested permit or permitting the commercial paintball area). Defined this way, the no action alternative also serves as a baseline or reference point for evaluating the environmental effects of the action alternatives. Inclusion of this alternative is done without regard to whether or not it is consistent with the Medford District RMP.

The no action alternative is not a "static" alternative. Implicit in it is a continuation of the environmental conditions and trends that currently exist or are occurring within the project area. This would include trends such as vegetation succession and consequent wildlife habitat changes, rates of erosion, trends in fire hazard changes, OHV use, *etc.*

C. Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The proposed action is to grant a one year duration special recreation permit and to allow the applicant to locate a commercial paintball operation on BLM land. The proposed paintball operation described below incorporates the initial proposed action from the applicant and mitigation measures developed by the BLM interdisciplinary team in conjunction with the applicant.

Three paintball fields (see Map 2) would be designated. Each field would be approximately 300' x 150'. A separate staging area would be located at the southwest end of the paintball permit area. The area is in a second growth stand and where manzanita and pole cutting has occurred in the past. An old skid road running northwest to southeast delimits the eastern boundary of the fields, which would encompass approximately 12 acres.

Parking will be along Upper Reeves Creek Road in a roadside pull-out to the south of the field. This parking area is currently approximately 70 feet by 80 feet, with a skid road leaving the parking area to the south of the paintball area. This skid road would be blocked to limit vehicles to the parking area. Parking will not be allowed along road 39-8-3.

A 50' buffer would be implemented between the playing field and roads 39-8-3 and 39-8-4. Paintball activities would be excluded from this buffer to provide for safety and to provide a visual screen from the roads.

No camping would be permitted under the terms of the permit.

Commercial paintball activities would be limited to weekends (Saturdays and Sundays) between April 1 to November 15. A maximum daily limit of 35 participants will be allowed, total.

Only water-soluble “field paint” would be permitted for use.

A staging/set up area will be located adjacent to road # 39-8-3 road in the southeast end of the permit area. If tables/spools/signs or any other developments are placed at the staging area, they would be removed from the permit area after each weekend event or moved to a location within the permit area that is not visible from the perimeter roads.

The construction / placement of temporary bunkers would be permitted at the site during each weekend. All bunkers would be made with “natural” material (e.g., boards, poles, pallets, sticks, and branches). Sticks, branches and poles would be gathered on-site for use in bunker construction or for removal to offer better movement throughout the area. Long term bunker materials would remain in the fields between events. No cutting of trees would be permitted.

Whenever the paintball activities / events occur, warning signs would be placed along the perimeter roads in a manner such that they would be clearly visible from both directions. Warning signs would be temporary and removed from the area after each weekend. All other signs (e.g., check in signs) would also be temporary and removed after each weekend. Other signs could be posted around the area (e.g., goggle signs, barrel plug signs and other safety signs). Placement of these signs would be done in a manner such that they would not be visible from the road nor located within the 50' visual buffer.

“Paintball use by permit only” signs would be placed at the site and visible from the road. These signs will be wood routed and placed on posts and left at the site as long as the permit is active. Nailing / bolting of signs to trees is not permitted.

A portable restroom would be placed at the parking area site during each weekend event. The permittee would be responsible for insuring that all trash would be picked up and the entire field and parking area policed after each weekend of operation. A sign noting that the permittee was cleaning the site would be allowed.

The permit holder would be permitted to charge admission. The permittee would be permitted to rent paintball guns and safety gear at the site as well as to sell paint and air.

No smoking would be allowed in the area, and the area would be signed as such. The permittee would be required to comply with all Oregon Department of Forestry fire restrictions.

D. Project design features

Project design features (PDFs) are included in the proposed action for the purpose of reducing anticipated adverse environmental impacts which might stem from the implementation of the proposal.

1. Botanical Resource Protection

If localized erosion control is necessary, native plant species or sterile wheat grass will be used. Re-establishment of native vegetation would be allowed to occur naturally on other disturbed areas. If any federal candidate, Bureau Sensitive or survey and manage plant species are encountered in the proposed project area, it would be buffered from the activity.

2. Cultural Resource Protection

If additional cultural sites are found within the project area, mitigation measures such as buffering sites from the activity, would be implemented to protect the sites.

3. Wildlife Resource Protection

If additional survey and manage species are located within the project area, sites would be buffered from activity.

4. Soil Resource Protection

Organic matter (litter, duff, and small limbs) would be raked to cover areas of exposed soil resulting from the permitted activity. This would be completed at the end of the permitted use season. Activity would not be allowed when conditions are wet and muddy which could result in heavy disturbance of the soil surface.

5. Stream Protection

There will be a no activity buffer of 50 feet maintained south of the class 4 stream that is located on the north end of the unit area.

Chapter 3

Environmental Consequences

A. Introduction

Only substantive site specific environmental changes that would result from implementing the proposed action or alternatives are discussed in this chapter. If an ecological component is not discussed, it should be assumed that the resource specialists have considered affects to that component and found the proposed action or alternatives would have minimal or no affects. Similarly, unless addressed specifically, the following were found not to be affected by the proposed action or alternatives: air quality; cultural or historical resources; Native American religious concerns; prime or unique farmlands; Flood plains; endangered, threatened or sensitive plant, animal or fish species; water quality (drinking/ground); wetlands/riparian zones; wild and scenic rivers. In addition, hazardous waste or materials are not directly involved in the proposed action or alternatives.

B. Site Specific Beneficial or Adverse Effects of the Alternatives

1. Resource: Botany

a. Affected Environment

The proposed paintball area is second growth Douglas-fir forest that has been recently thinned, slashed, hand piled and burned to reduce fuel loadings. The area was surveyed for vascular plants, lichens, bryophytes and fungi (both spring and fall) under the 3+3 project. No survey and manage or special status species were found during these surveys.

b. Environmental Effects

1) Alternative 1: No Action

Under the No Action alternative, trampling or effects to understory vegetation would not occur.

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Trampling from paintball activities could impact understory vegetation by reducing coverage and compacting soils. There are no other effects anticipated from the proposed activity.

Specific potential phyto-toxic effects of paintballs are unknown but would appear to be inconsequential. Manufacturer information indicates that paintballs are filled with food dyes and polyethylene glycol, are non-toxic, non-caustic, water-soluble and biodegradable. The pertinent Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) indicates that the paintballs are made of soft gelatin capsules containing colored liquid and are non-hazardous.

3) Cumulative Effects

The only cumulative effects anticipated would occur if more paintball use is allowed on BLM land. The area proposed for this permit is not problematic for botanical resources, but more paintball use may lead to that if activities are proposed on more sensitive ground.

2. Resource: Soil and Water

a. Affected Environment

Soil in the area is mapped (Soil Survey, SCS) as Pollard loam. There is a thin (<1 inch thick) layer of litter and duff over the mineral soil. Slopes are mild at 7 to 12%. There is an intermittent stream (Class 4) that runs on the north boundary about 300 feet before veering away from the unit. The stream banks are well defined, steep, and one to two feet to the channel bottom.

b. Environmental Consequences

1) Alternative 1: No Action

There would be no additional effects to soil and water under this alternative.

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Trampling would occur on an estimated 10 to 20% of the permit area. This could result in disturbance and slight compaction of the top soil and exposure of mineral. The slight degree of compaction (less the 10% increase of bulk density) would have little effect on growth rates of the vegetation. There would also be some loss of the fine organic duff. However pulling back of duff and litter (see PDF 4) should eliminate any possible erosion. There should be no effect to the intermittent stream because of the 50 foot buffer required in PDF 5.

3. Resource: Wildlife (special status, S&M species and their habitats)

a. Affected Environment

The proposed action area is composed of second growth, mid-seral Douglas fir ranging in size from 6-12", with occasional sugar and ponderosa pine. Hardwood species include California black-oak and Pacific madrone. Canopy closure varies across the unit, ranging from 30% to 50%. The entire area was surveyed for sensitive species including Survey and Manage species for the 3 + 3 Land Management Project. No survey and manage Wildlife species or special status species were located during these surveys.

b. Environmental Consequences

1) Alternative 1: No Action

Under the No Action alternative coarse wood habitat at its current level and understory vegetation patterns would continue at their current level.

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The proposed action is not anticipated to have any affect any special status species but may affect numerous species associated with down coarse wood, particular large logs. This area is biologically rich, providing important habitat for a host of species including mollusc, insects and small vertebrates. The moving of down wood breaks the ground contact zone, where the majority of the biological activity is present. The impacts would be very localized and would not negatively affect any large scale wildlife populations. In order to minimize wildlife species associated with coarse wood, mitigating measure 1 is proposed.

Proposed Mitigating Measure 1: Do not move large pieces of coarse wood (i.e. >10" in diameter).

The proposed action has the potential to compact the soil and trample low vegetation. Species utilizing low vegetation which include ground nesting bird species such as the Dark-eyed junco would be vulnerable to disturbance.

4. Resource: Recreation/Cultural

a. Affected Environment

The proposed permit area is currently not used for recreation, with the exception of casual recreational uses such as hunting and target shooting (at the parking area). The area was once a pole sale area. Surrounding BLM land is a popular location for dumping household trash. The site is fairly open, especially as a result of the recent brushing, hand piling and burning. There are many stumps from the brushing work and may pose a safety hazard.

b. Environmental consequences

1) Alternative 1: No Action

Under the no action alternative, paintball use would not occur at the site. No increased impacts to this site would occur and recreational use would remain low. Paintball use may occur illegally on other BLM lands without a specific site to play. Dumping and target shooting on adjacent BLM lands would continue to occur. Visuals would remain the same, with greens and browns the dominant color.

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Under the action alternative, paintball use would be permitted at the site. Impacts would include increased trampling to the site and longer term removal of understory vegetation from increased use. Visual effects of the paintball use include paint on trees and the ground during the dry season, increased signage at the site from the paintball use, and views of bunkers in the unit. Vehicular traffic would increase along road 39-8-3. Noise would increase with the increased use and the paintball guns. Fire hazard would increase with summer use of the area, although the permittee is required to follow fire regulations.

It would be difficult to preclude paintball use of the site by non-permitted users and the site may become well known as the “paintball area”. Impacts relating to non-regulated use include all of the above, and increased trash, trampling, and daily use of the site. All impacts would be greater with non-regulated use, because they would not be under the same stipulations as the permittee.

Dumping and target shooting would probably decrease on adjacent public lands, as the permittee would be present during operations and would be monitoring the parking area. The site was chosen as a potential location for this type of use, as there are no neighbors, the site is already being treated under a forest management project and no rare plant or wildlife species will be affected by the use. The area would also be monitored for trash and cleaned up, as it is historically used for dumping.

5. Resource: Fire and Fuels

a. Affected Environment

The current fuel situation can be described as a discontinuous fuel bed with reduced ladder fuels on flat terrain. Due to the high level and concentration of recreational use and the scheduled implementation dates, the proposed project is characterized with a high fire risk and moderate fire hazard. *Hazard* is defined as the existence of a fuel complex that constitutes a threat of wildfire ignition, unacceptable fire behavior and severity, or suppression difficulty. *Risk* is defined as the potential of ignition, either human caused or natural. Wildfire risk associated with the operation of mechanical equipment has already been reduced by treatment of the understory vegetation and the handpiling and burning of slash by the “3+3” Forest Management Project (EA# OR110-98-19).

b. Environmental Effects

1) Alternative 1: No Action

The conditions that affect fire risk and fire hazard should remain similar to current conditions and unregulated recreational activities would likely continue in the area. The understory vegetation has been thinned and the slash hand piled and burned in this area per the “3+3” Forest Management Project.

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The proposed action could have an appreciable effect on the current fire risk. The potential for human caused ignition will increase due to the high level of activities scheduled during the warm and dry seasons. The proposed action would concentrate human activities and the associated risk of fire in a location that can be regulated and monitored by the BLM and Oregon Department of Forestry. Regulatory signs (i.e. No Smoking, No Motorized Vehicles, etc.) would be posted near the activity area to mitigate some of this.

6. Resource: Roads

a. Affected Environment

The affected area will be accessed from road 39-8-3, an aggregate surfaced road. There is an existing parking area approximately 80 feet wide by 70 feet long that is currently being used for parking, target practice and a dump site. Several skid roads continue from this parking area into the woods. The paintball area is outlined by a skid road that goes between road 39-8-3 and the Kerby Mainline Road. The skid road is barricaded at both ends and is impassable by vehicles, allowing only foot traffic into the area.

b. Environmental Effects

1) Alternative 1: No Action

There would be essentially no change to the roads.

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Traffic: Increased traffic on road 39-8-3 will shorten the life span of the existing aggregate on the road, aid in rutting, increase water runoff and increase the amount of sediment leaving the roadway. Parking along the roadway damages shoulders, fills in ditch lines, increases sediment load, destroys ditch line vegetation and increases maintenance costs.

Parking area: Effects from the parking area with increased traffic may include rutting, increased surface runoff, channelization of surface runoff and increased sediment load leaving the parking area. The positive effects of the parking area is that it reduces the need for parking along road 39-8-3.

7. Resource: Fisheries / Aquatic

a. Affected Environment

There are no streams or riparian reserves present within the proposed action site. The nearest streams are several hundred feet outside the skid roads which form the boundaries of the site. The location of the

proposed action is a flat area which is not likely to produce surface runoff which could reach the streams, especially across the roads which border the site. The two streams which are closest to the site are intermittent non-fish bearing streams with ephemeral flows. The Illinois River is the nearest fish-bearing stream and is approximately 3 miles downstream of the site. The Illinois is used by coho salmon, which are federally listed as 'threatened'.

b. Environmental Consequences

1) Alternative 1: No Action

Under the no action alternative, no effects to fisheries or aquatic resources are anticipated.

2) Alternative 2: Proposed Action

No effects to fisheries or aquatic resources are anticipated from the proposed action. This determination includes short and long term, direct and indirect, and cumulative effects. Impacts have been considered temporally on the short term and long term scales, and spatially at the project/site and watershed scales. There is no effect to coho salmon or coho critical habitat from the proposed action.

Chapter 4

Agencies and Persons Consulted

A. Agencies and Persons Consulted

A scoping letter was sent out to 26 neighbors and interested parties. No responses were received from the scoping letter.

B. Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

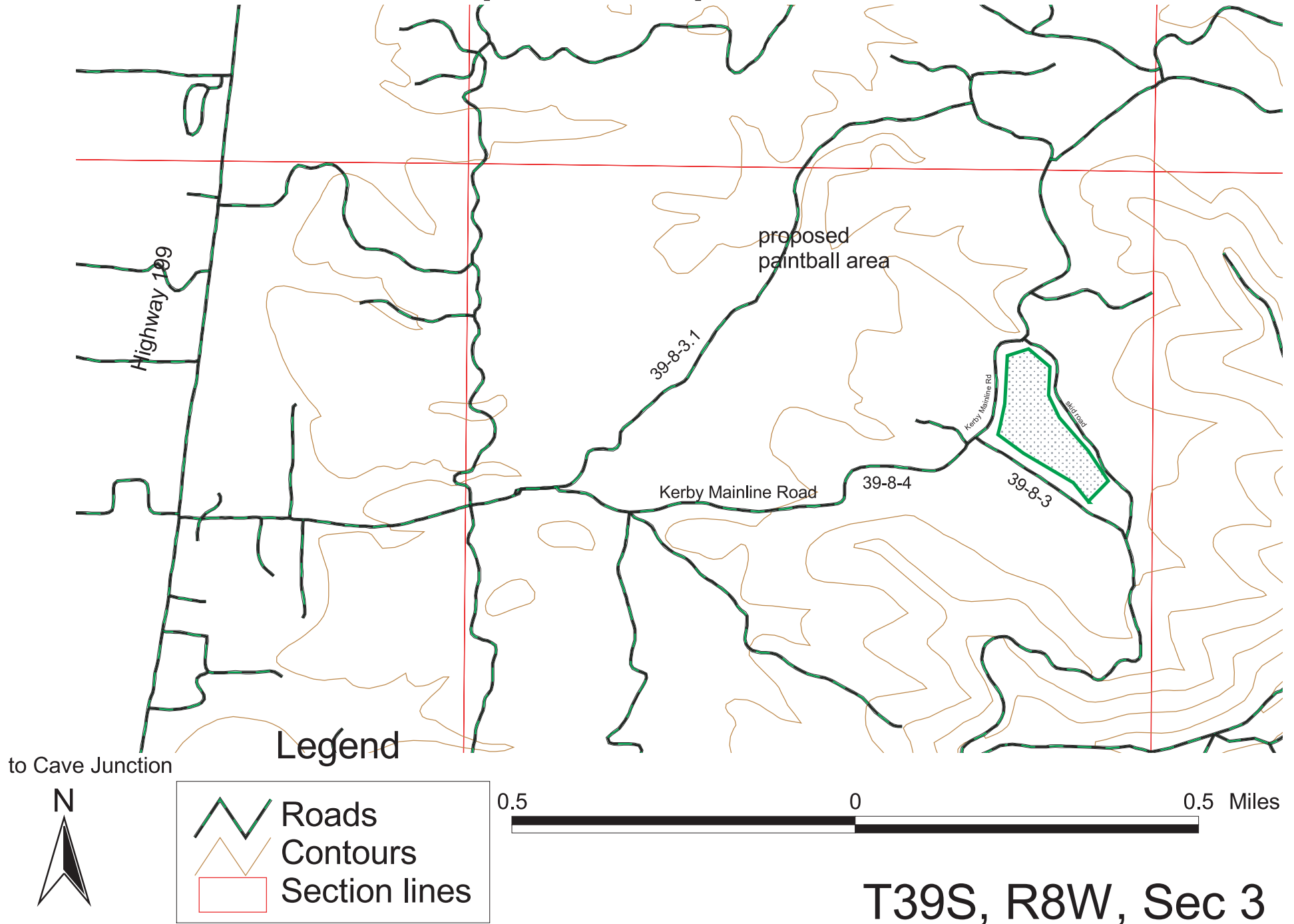
Copies of the EA document will be available for formal public review in the BLM Medford District Office. A formal 15 day public comment period will be held following an announcement in the Grants Pass Courier.

Appendix A

Project Maps

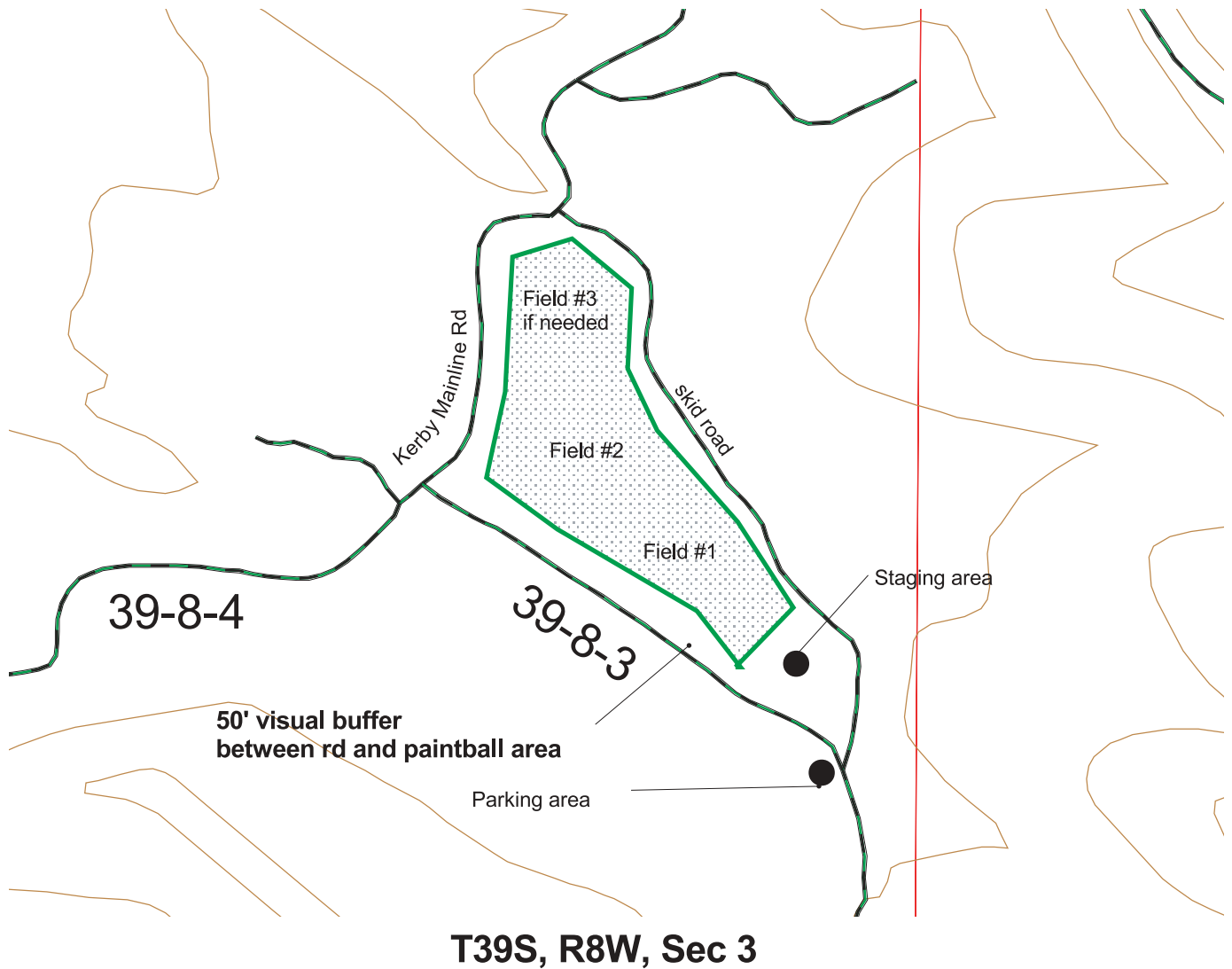
to Grants Pass

Map 1 Proposed Paintball Area



T39S, R8W, Sec 3

Map 2-Proposed Paintball Area



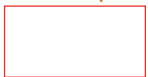
0.2 0 0.2 0.4 Miles



Roads



Contours



Section lines



Proposed Paintball Area



Appendix B

Potential Monitoring

1. Monitor the parking area for surface runoff and sedimentation. If runoff is causing rutting and channelized flow, the parking area could be surfaced with rock.
2. Monitor the visual effects of paintball use in the area to insure that the water based paint is washed from the trees and is not readily visible from the road the following spring. Short term and long term visual impact would be considered with regard to the issuance of any future permits.